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PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

Report of the Royal Commission on the care and control of the Feeble Minded, Vols. I-VIII. Wyman & Sons, London, 1908.

The most important contribution to the literature of mental defectives that has appeared for many years is the Report of the Royal Commission in England. This Commission, consisting of eleven men and one woman, was appointed by King Edward in 1904, "to consider the existing methods of dealing with idiots and epileptics, and with imbecile, feeble-minded, or defective persons."

This Commission has had a remarkable opportunity to study the problem and apparently they have made good use of the four years that they have devoted to it. They had full power to summon witnesses, visit institutions, and carry on investigations. They have utilized all of these methods, and have presented their findings in eight large "blue books" of which the eighth alone contains 512 pages. Five of these volumes contain the evidence relating to conditions in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the United States; one contains the Reports of Medical Investigations, one Appendices, and the last or eighth volume contains the recommendations of the Commission.

One of the most interesting chapters is that which discusses the cause of mental defect. The Commission did not consider an exhaustive investigation into this subject within their province, but they took much testimony from which it appears that the great weight of authority in England is for heredity as against environment. We had thought this point beyond question. It is the only view in accordance with the prevailing biological views and, besides that, it is practically certain that from 60 to 80% of all defectives have defective ancestry. There are, of course, a few cases of defect due to accidental injury to the brain, but these are comparatively rare and do not affect the main question.

Professor T. Clifford Allbutt says "I regard feeble-mindedness (if not accidental) as always hereditary." Dr. Bevan Lewis says "I look upon feeble-mindedness as a germinal variation as all variations are." Dr. Tredgold states that over 80% of mental defectives are connected with neuropathic inheritance. He has never seen a normal child born of two feeble-minded persons. Twenty-five physicians among the most prominent in England, and all dealing with large numbers of mental defectives, express similar opinions.

It must then be stated as the accepted opinion among those of largest experience, that feeble-mindedness is in the first instance a spontaneous variation, like a sixth finger or any other "sport", and as such is likely to be transmitted. The Commission sum up their conclusions on this point as follows.

(1) "That both on the grounds of fact and of theory there is the highest degree of probability that feeble-mindedness is usually spontaneous in origin—that is, not due to influences acting on the parents—and tends strongly to be inherited."

(2) "That especially in view of the evidence concerning fertility the prevention of mentally defective persons from becoming parents would tend largely to diminish the number of such persons in the population."

(3) "That the evidence for these conclusions strongly supports measures, which on other grounds are of pressing importance, for placing mentally defective persons, men and women, who are living at large and uncontrolled, in institutions where they will be employed and detained, and in this and other ways, kept under effectual supervision so long as may be necessary."

The "evidence concerning fertility" referred to is to the effect that mental defectives are about twice as fertile as normal individuals. Sixteen feeble-minded women in one workhouse together produced one hundred and sixteen children! The Commission concludes that the people would rightly condemn surgical and other artificial interference to prevent hereditary transmission of mental defect. Of twenty-one witnesses who mentioned the subject only three expressed opinions in favor of the practicability of such a course. As to preventing the marriage of defectives, they are equally conservative, and think it would be unwise to modify the existing law.

As to the number of mental defectives, their returns are rather startling. It has been generally held that two to every thousand of the population was a conservative estimate. The Commission find in Scotland 2.5 per thousand, in England 4.6, and in Ireland 5.7. If these figures are reliable, they furnish much food for thought and suggest many things in sociology.

The practical side of the work of the Commission is embodied in ninety-six recommendations for England and Wales, forty-three for Scotland and seventy-four for Ireland.

H. H. GODDARD.

Das Gedächtnis; die Ergebnisse der experimentellen Psychologie und ihre Anwendung in Unterricht und Erziehung, von DR. MAX OFFNER. Berlin, Reuther & Reichard, 1909. pp. X: 238.

The chapter of Memory is one of the oldest in Psychology and one of the most voluminous in its literature. Even the experimental literature which began only twenty-five years ago with the work of Ebbinghaus has reached serious proportions. A work like this of Offner's which gathers up and co-ordinates with judicial fairness the results obtained by the large body of different workers is, therefore, particularly welcome. Though the book is intended in the first instance for teachers and for those who are entering psychology through their interest in memory, and for this reason has been kept close to essentials and purged of unnecessary technicalities, it will be found not to come amiss to the working psychologist whose labors have kept him in other fields and who wishes to put himself rapidly in touch with recent work on memory. The material is systematically presented and made further accessible by an analytical table of contents and full indexes. A bibliography of 181 titles, though not all upon the experimental studies of memory, is also included. The work as a whole is well calculated to fulfil the author's hope that it may promote a "comprehension of the methods of the newer psychology and confidence in them."

E. C. S.

Ce que l'Armée peut être pour la Nation. Par le Lieutenant adjoint d'État-Major A. FASTREZ. Paris, Misch et Thron, 1907. pp. xiii, 294.

This work was called forth by Mlle. Joteyko's book on *Entraînement et fatigue au point de vue militaire*, 1905, and seeks to refute, on behalf of the Belgian army, the conclusion arrived at by its author and accepted by Prof. Richet, that the limit of military training is satisfactorily attained at the end of six to twelve months. M. Fastrez believes, on the contrary, that it is unwise to reduce the present term